

Message Text

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ACTION EUR-12

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R 261100Z MAY 77
FM AMCONSUL STRASBOURG
TO SECSTATE WASHDC 1025
INFO AMEMBASSY PARIS
AMCONSUL BORDEAUX
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AMCONSUL MARSEILLE
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UNCLAS STRASBOURG 109

E.O.11652: N/A

TAGS: PINT, ELAB, FR.

SUBJECT: MAY 24 GENERAL STRIKE IN ALSACE

1. MAY 24TH'S GENERAL LABOR STRIKE PROTESTING PRIME MINISTER BARRE'S ECONOMIC AUSTERITY PROGRAM WAS MARKED BY NUMEROUS PEACEFUL WORKERS' MARCHES AND DEMONSTRATIONS THROUGHOUT ALSACE. THE STRIKE'S ECONOMIC IMPACT WAS FELT LARGELY IN THE PUBLIC SECTOR WITH NOTICEABLY LESS EFFECT IN PRIVATE INDUSTRY.

2. LABOR OFFICIALS REPORTED THAT THE PROTEST HAD RESULTED IN THE HIGHEST LEVEL OF WORKER PARTICIPATION IN A STRIKE SINCE MAY 1968. HOWEVER, EVEN THOUGH THE STRIKE HAD A WIDER BASE OF UNION SUPPORT THAN THAT OF OCTOBER 1976'S PROTEST AGAINST THE BARRE PLAN, IT APPEARED TO HAVE BEEN ONLY marginally MORE EFFECTIVE. UNION SOURCES PUT THE NUMBER OF STRIKERS IN THE BAS-RHIN AT 45,000 WITH MANY MORE WORKING AT REDUCED EFFICIENCY DUE TO ELECTRICAL INTERRUPTIONS. BETWEEN 5-10 THOUSAND PARADED THROUGH DOWNTOWN STRASBOURG, WHILE SMALLER DEMONSTRATIONS OCCURED IN MULHOUSE (5-6,000), COLMAR (1,000), AND BELFORT (2,000).

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3. THE STRIKE'S EFFECTS WERE PARTICULARLY NOTICEABLE IN THE PUBLIC SECTOR. BUS SERVICE WAS TEMPORARILY SUSPENDED IN SOME CITIES, WHILE SOME LOCALITIES, INCLUDING STRASBOURG, SUFFERED LIMITED ELECTRICAL POWER CUTS. MAIL SERVICE WAS DOWN ALTHOUGH MORNING DELIVERIES WERE MADE. PTT ABSENTEEISM REACHED OVER 50 PERCENT IN SOME SECTORS. SNCF PARTICIPATION WAS GENERALLY OVER

30 PERCENT WHILE OVER HALF OF UNIONIZED TEACHERS FAILED TO REPORT TO THEIR CLASSES.

4. IN GENERAL THE STRIKE'S IMPACT ON THE PRIVATE SECTOR DOES NOT APPEAR TO HAVE BEEN AS SIGNIFICANT, SAVE LOSSES IN PRODUCTION DUE TO POWER PROBLEMS. THE HEAD OF STRASBOURG CHAMBER OF COMMERCE ESTIMATED THAT 60 PERCENT OF WORKERS IN THE PRIVATE SECTOR REPORTED TO THEIR JOBS, 20 PERCENT COULD NOT WORK BECAUSE PLANTS WERE CLOSED DUE TO FEAR OF POWER CUTS, AND 20 PERCENT PARTICIPATED IN THE STRIKE. TWO LOCAL MAJOR AMERICAN FIRMS WITH SUBSTANTIAL LEVELS OF UNIONIZATION, REMINGTON RAND AND GENERAL MOTORS, SAID THAT THEIR ABSENTEEISM WAS ONLY SLIGHTLY HIGHER THAN NORMAL WHILE CLARK EQUIPMENT, THE SITE OF CONTINUING LABOR DIFFICULTIES, LOST NEARLY A THIRD OF ITS WORK FORCE TO THE STRIKE.

5. COMMENT: IN GENERAL, THE MAY 24TH STRIKE PRESENTED SOME INCONVENIENCES TO ALSATIANS, SLOWING BUT NOT PARALYZING THE LOCAL ECONOMY. PERHAPS THE INDEPENDENT CHARACTER OF THE ALSATIANS AND THEIR UNWILLINGNESS TO FOLLOW DIRECTIVES FROM PARIS WERE CONTRIBUTING FACTORS. AN OFFICIAL FROM THE STRASBOURG PREFECTURE TOLD THE CONSULATE THAT THE IMPACT OF THIS STRIKE WAS FAR LESS SIGNIFICANT THAN THE 1968 STRIKE, PARTICULARLY SINCE THOSE DISORDERS WERE SUSTAINED OVER A MUCH LONGER PERIOD OF TIME. END COMMENT.ROMINE

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